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What Is A Prophet?

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by

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WHAT IS A PROPHET?

Our English word "prophet" has a history, simple, honorable, and easy to trace. Its first occurrence in extant literature is in Herodotus of the fifth century B. C. Plato and Aeschylus also employed it, and probably it was in common use among the early Greeks. The Greek word is *prophētēs* from *pro*, "forth," "before," and *phanai*, "to speak." So the prophet was, etymologically, one who spoke out; and in the early literature he spoke out for some deity, such as Zeus, Dionysus, or Apollo. The function of the Greek *prophētēs*, therefore, was somewhat narrow. In fact, Plato argued that his sole business was the interpreting of dreams which had come to another sacred officer, the *mantis*, or dreamer.

Our English word is a direct descendant in the third generation from the Greek; for the translators of the Bible into Latin, instead of taking the Latin word *vātes*, appropriated the Greek term, and put a new word, *prophēta*, into the Latin language. The early English took it from the Latin. It was spelled in several ways, including proffyte, and profit; but by the 17th century it was standardized in the form in which we now have it.

Tracing the etymology of a term, however, does not define it. *Deism* and *theism* etymologically are synonymous; but in religious thinking they are quite different. And how pitifully inadequate would be an explanation of *fundamentalist* and *modernist* on the basis of mere etymology.

So when we try to answer the question, "*What is a Prophet?*" we must take a wider survey than that of the etymological meaning of the English word. For *prophētēs*, the Greek ancestor of our English word, was taken by the Greek translators of the Old Testament and attached directly or indirectly to some half-dozen different Hebrew words which have much broader significance than the Greek.

The regular Hebrew word for prophet is *nābhî*, which like *prophētēs* means "speaker," "announcer." Etymologically there is nothing in the word itself to indicate any association

with a deity. A *nābhî* is not by etymology one who speaks forth or speaks before any divine being. We should not say, however, that there was no divine implication in the word; for among early peoples almost all activities were considered God-inspired. So anyone who announced something in a way that sounded at all authoritative immediately gained the reputation of being inspired by some higher power. If the thing announced proved true, the god was trying to help or at least inform the people. If the thing announced proved to be false then the god through his human spokesman was trying to hurt or at least to fool the unsuspecting mortals. Back of the Hebrew word is the Assyrian or Babylonian *nabû*, which means "to call out," "to wail," "to announce," and a participle of this verb—*the howling one*—was applied to certain kinds of priests. We may be sure, then, in early times at least, that the Hebrew prophet, the *nābhî*, was so designated on account of the emphatic manner of his utterance. The word *nābhî* is by far the most common term for prophet in the Old Testament.

There are, however, five other Hebrew words connected with the idea of prophecy, and we should pause for brief notice of them. The seer, Hebrew *rō'ê*, was the precursor of the prophet. In I S. 9:9 we read, "he that is now called a Prophet was aforetime called a seer." The idea of the seer as the messenger of the deity is very old. The early Indo-Iranian poets, for instance, were called Rishis or seers, and were said not to *compose*, but to *see* their poems. Even before the time of writing, the idea seems to have been that the inspired poet, losing self-consciousness, would *see* the poem before him and repeat what the god had shown him.

But by the time the Hebrews began to write their literature the seer had pretty well given place to the prophet, though from several passages (e. g., Is. 30:10) it would seem that a group of seers still existed and played a part in the religious life of Israel. Samuel was called a seer and so was Hanani, the father of Jehu.

Another word translated *seer* in the English version is the Hebrew *hôzê*, which possibly should be translated *gazer*.

There was no distinct line between the gazer and the prophet; for we read that the prophet Gad was David's gazer, *hôzê* (II S. 24:11). On the other hand, it would appear that there was some distinction. For instance, Is. 30:10 literally translated would read, "Who say to their seers, 'see not,' and to their gazers, 'gaze not for us at right things; tell us smooth things; gaze at deceits.'" And such passages as II K. 17:13, "Yet the Lord testified unto Israel and unto Judah by every prophet and every gazer," would imply some difference. The distinction, however, is unimportant. The seer, the *rô'ê*, received his message by passive vision; the gazer, the *hôzê*, received his message possibly by deliberate looking; the prophet, the *nâbhî*, announced his message, no matter how he had acquired it.

The two other words, which need only be mentioned, are: (1) the word translated "prophecy," *massâ*, literally "burden," the "thing lifted up," with the idea that a message was held up for the people's observation; and (2) the word translated in Mic. 2:11, "be a prophet," *nâṭaph*, literally "cause to drop," "cast." (Compare our expression, "drop pearls of wisdom," and the words of Jesus, "cast pearls before swine.") But these two words are rare and unimportant.

The Hebrew *nâbhî* was the word which was translated by the Greek *prophêtēs*, the Latin *prophēta*, and the English *prophet*.

THE *NÂBHÎ* OF THE HEBREWS

When the Hebrew nation came into existence the office of the prophet was definite and well recognized. There doubtless was a long development behind it. Today we know that the Hebrews borrowed freely from the cultures around them, that they were a people with many social affinities, that they were set apart by God not in a sense of being put into isolation. They were not kept from being exposed to foreign influence, nor were they immunized therefrom. As they borrowed in language, in literature, in commercial methods, so they borrowed in religion. No doubt the *nâbhî* represented

the development of an idea having its origin in the very early days of the race.

Among primitive peoples the head of the clan is apt to be the religious head as well as the civil head. Then outside of the strong man—the physical head of the clan—there may develop another who acts as the interpreter of the divine will. He may be exceptionally clever or he may be insane. At any rate his mind seems to function in a peculiar way, and so he is credited with standing in a special relation to the unseen powers. He is the medicine-man. He possesses charms which heal the sick; he gazes at flying birds, the stars, or the livers of dead animals, and by them interprets the future. He plans the movements of the clan. He tells his brethren when to sow grain, when to migrate, when to make war, how to dispose of the dead. He superintends the sacrifices and offers up the prayers. We find this sacred personage well developed in all the early races of history—the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the early Aryans, the Greeks, and the Romans. The remains of men as far back as the Middle Stone Age give abundant evidence of similar dignitaries.

Still, in a simple political organization one man often is both priest and king and prophecy is but a function of the priesthood. Thus Abraham was the political and military head of his clan; the priest (for he offered the sacrifices); and the prophet (for God spoke to him and he announced the divine will). Abraham is the first Biblical character to be called a *nābhī* (Gen. 20:7).

The tendency towards specialization is shown in Aaron. On account of Moses' professed lack of proficiency in public speaking God appointed Aaron as his *mouth* (Ex. 4:16) or his *prophet* (Ex. 7:1). Aaron was also a priest. Moses, it is true, exercised the functions of priest and prophet himself, and became the prophet *par excellence*, since God spoke to him face to face while to other prophets the divine will was revealed through visions (Dt. 34:10). But we do see here a division of labor, and by the time of the Exodus the office of prophet was distinct, even though the exercise of that office did not keep a man from priestly or any other activities.

The Mosaic prophecy had very little to do with pure prediction. It was law. Still the predictive element must have been there. In Dt. 18:15-22, we find accuracy of prediction the test of prophecy. If what the prophet announced failed to come to pass, then the people would know that the prophet had spoken presumptuously, and would not be afraid of him. The prophet who spoke presumptuously was to die. This test would seem simple; but in Dt. 13:1-5 we learn that if a prophet were right in his predictions but preached apostacy, he was still to be discredited. Moreover we know that this test was not always used. And if, as many hold, the present Book of Deuteronomy was influenced by Jeremiah we find an inconsistency; for Jeremiah began his prophetic career by predicting the downfall of Jerusalem at the hands of the Scythians and then the Scythians passed by Jerusalem without disturbing it. According to Dt. 18:20 Jeremiah should have been put to death.

But that augury, or prediction, is an essential part of prophecy, in fact the most important part, has been the popular view since Old Testament times. It is simple and it appeals to our credulous, optimistic natures. We like to feel that there are specially gifted people who by some way unknown to us can tell what the future will bring forth, just as we like to believe in those who profess ability to tell us where to find lost articles, to make us fortunate in investments, or to put hair on our bald heads.

There are those, then, who would apply the test of Dt. 18 to all Biblical prophecy, or rather would apply all Biblical prophecy to the test of Dt. 18. All prophecy, they say, is prediction of what is to come. A great deal that was predicted by the Biblical prophets did not come to pass. But the Bible is inerrant. Therefore the predictions of the Biblical prophets are coming to pass now or soon will be fulfilled. So they are apt to see the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in the automobile (Nah. 2:4), the radio (Jer. 50:46), the airplane (Joel 2:30), the world war (Mic. 3:5), the Chinese civil war (Dan. 9:26), the earthquakes (Ezek. 38:19), the fam-

ines (Ezek. 14:13), knickers and bobbed hair (Jer. 31:22).

The Old Testament prophet, however, was concerned with the present and the immediate future much more than with the distant future. The *nābhī* was in many instances a practical politician.

We should note that in Biblical usage the application of the title *nābhī* to a man meant nothing as to the authenticity of what he had to say. He might be a prophet of Baal, like Jezebel's co-workers, whom Elijah discomfited. Or he might be a prophet of JHVH, but with an eye toward his own material prosperity rather than on the welfare of the nation, like Isaiah's "prophet that teacheth lies" (Is. 9:14), or Ezekiel's "foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit and have seen nothing" (Ezek. 13:3).

At least in the early days of the Hebrew monarchy the term was applied to the roving hordes of dervishes, who did bizarre things in the throes of religious ecstasy. An instance of this is the story told in I S. 19:18-24. There David, fleeing from Saul, took refuge with Samuel. When Saul's messengers came to take David they found a group of prophets with Samuel at their head prophesying. Instead of breaking up the meeting and arresting the fugitive they joined in. A second group of messengers did likewise, and a third. Then Saul made a personal investigation. The herd instinct was too strong in him. The Spirit of God (which as any Hebrew student knows, may mean in this case a mighty frenzy) came upon him. He took off his clothes and joined the group. This was considered a rather unkingly thing to do. Hence there arose the saying, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

We see, then, that in Old Testament usage a prophet may signify the spokesman of a false god or a fraudulent spokesman of the true God or a raving religious fanatic. But in the higher usage the term is applied to a sane man who received an authentic message from God and who had the courage to proclaim it. Prophets of this kind were Moses, Aaron, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, and the other prophets whose

words have come to us only as quotations in narratives. So were the three Major Prophets and the twelve Minor Prophets, whose words have been preserved.

These were men of good mentality. Some of them, to be sure, may have been considered queer, and, in our day, would have been termed maladjusted. But they knew what they were saying and the people who heard them, though many times not believing, understood.

The Prophets were concerned with three aspects of the national life: the political, the moral, and the religious. The prophet, of course, would have recognized no such distinction; for to him religion, morals, and politics were one. Neither the individual nor the nation could be separated from God. In politics the prophets sometimes were mistaken. Samuel may have been mistaken in his choice of Saul as King; Elijah may have been mistaken in his efforts to overthrow the strong dynasty of Omri and Ahab in favor of Jehu, who proved weak; Isaiah may have been mistaken in preaching the inviolability of Jerusalem; and Jeremiah may have been mistaken in expecting the invasion of the Scythians. But on the whole the prophets showed keen political insight. Isaiah's preaching of trust in God instead of in foreign alliances was thoroughly sound at the time of the threatened siege of Jerusalem by Rezin and Pekah; and his confidence at the time the city was besieged by the army of Sennacherib was well borne out by subsequent events. Judah would have been much better off had it followed the advice of Jeremiah, who seemed not a mere pacifist, but a pro-Babylonian traitor. We should not, however, put too much blame on the 100 per centers of Judah. Had the officials of Jerusalem been like those of our country, ten years ago, Jeremiah would not only have been arrested and put into a cistern from which a friend could rescue him; he certainly would have served a good prison sentence at hard labor and some would have wanted him shot as a spy. But Jeremiah was right. Like Cassandra he was correct more often than he was believed.

Deeper than the political activity of the prophets was that which affected the morals and religion of their people. In large measure the immortality of the Old Testament is due to its recording of the moral and religious development of Israel. It shows how God took a people with crude moral standards and naive religious beliefs and developed this people ethically and spiritually until it was ready to produce Jesus Christ, who gave us the perfect ethical standard and the perfect conception of religion. Since the time of Jesus there has been no development except the better appreciation of what He said and did. This autobiographical and often unconscious recording of the development in the Old Testament makes it a unique book. The Old Testament did, as Mr. H. G. Wells has pointed out, contain the best civil laws, sanitary rules, history, poetry, and religious teaching known to the men of the times in which it was written. It would be a splendid thing if we could have the bible which Mr. Wells proposed, with the best civil laws, sanitary rules, history, poetry, and religious teaching of the present time. But there would be no danger of its replacing our Old Testament, because it could not record as does the Old Testament the God-directed development of a special people.

Now this development was made possible by the prophets. God spoke and led the people through them. We think today that we understand the technique of their inspiration better than our fathers did. What our ancestors and what the prophet himself called the spirit of God we call the unconscious. Of course this does not eliminate God at all; for He can work through the unconscious as well as through an objective vision. The prophets were mystics. They felt an inner urge which overcame their resistance and made them speak out.

It is well known that there must have been many prophets reckoned as false prophets because they were mistaken. They were actuated by motives like those of the great prophets. They were just as sure that they were right, just as sincere, just as unselfish, just as courageous. But they were mistaken and hence discredited by posterity. In Presbyterian termin-

ology we should say that though they did the best they could, they were not elected.

The Old Testament *nābhī*, in the highest sense, then, was a man who felt himself to be a special messenger of God, who proclaimed his message, and who was proved in time to be right.

The *nābhī* continued in activity through Old Testament times. He played his part in all the career of the nation. He was active during the monarchy, during the double monarchy, during the existence of the southern kingdom alone. He had his say at the time of the exile. Ezekiel arose as the prophet of the exile and saved the people from absorption into Babylon. Prophets proclaimed the return to Jerusalem encouraged the disheartened group of repatriated Jews, and stimulated the rebuilding of the temple. Possibly prophetic activity continued down into Maccabean times. But in the century before Jesus there were no prophets. That the religion of the Jews had become static is hardly an accurate statement, for there were great teachers. But they based their teachings on the Scriptures, not on special revelations, and their didactic methods prevented their being considered prophets.

THE PROPHĒTĒS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

John the Baptist, however, went back to the old prophetic manner of speaking, and he was reckoned a prophet. His striking manner of dress, his coarse fare, his positive, special message of repentance, and his voice crying in the wilderness set him apart as no mere pedagog. Jesus called him "a prophet and more than a prophet."

By some it is considered that John closed the line of prophets and that Jesus began the new Messianic age; but the title "prophet" did not so easily down. In fact Jesus Himself is generally considered a prophet. He called Himself a prophet, and was called a prophet by both the people at large and His disciples. But He laid no stress on this title;

in fact in so designating Himself, as in the proverb, "A prophet is without honor in his own country," His language may have been figurative. He evidently preferred to be called "teacher." But His followers have magnified His prophetic function, and some of them would make it almost equal to His office as Savior. At any rate John was by no means the last to whom the title has been applied. For the early church considered Jesus a prophet and considered many other men prophets. These men in the New Testament received the title *prophētēs*, which continued to be applied to the Old Testament prophets when they were quoted or cited.

Judas and Silas were prophets (Acts 15:32). There were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers—Barnabas, Symeon that was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen the foster brother of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul (Acts 13:1). In the church at large God set first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20; 3:5). At least part of the work of these New Testament prophets seems to have been prediction; for at one time "there came down prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch; and there stood up one of the named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great famine over all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius." (Acts 11:27-28).

The author of the Book of Revelation, too, considered predictive prophecy his office: "And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass." (Rev. 22:6.)

Outside of Revelation, however, we have very little of the utterances of the New Testament prophets, though we can tell something of their teachings. Evidently they were often the best preachers and were accorded respect; but their importance was nothing like that of the great Prophets of Old Testament times. They were subordinate to the Apostles. Paul says: "If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of things which *I* write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord." (I Cor. 14:37).

The gift of prophecy, too, seems to have been fairly common. Various inspired members of the Apostolic Church gave ecstatic utterances much as did the wandering bands of Old Testament prophets and as do the devout members of the Holiness churches today. Paul gives this rather restraining advice: "Let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discriminate (ARV, margin). But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence. For *ye all* can prophecy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets; for God is not a God of *confusion*, but of peace." (I Cor. 14:29-33).

In the New Testament, then, the prophet, while supplying enthusiasm and comfort, was apt to disturb the dignity and equanimity of the church.

THE PROPHĒTA OF THE EARLY CHURCH

During the centuries immediately after Apostolic times prophecy continued. The evangelists who went about from place to place preaching were thought to be prophets. Ignatius claimed the office of prophet and Polycarp was described as a "prophetic teacher" (Pullan, *Church of the Fathers*, p. 26). The daughters of Philip and Quadratus and numerous others were considered to have the special gift. But in the second century prophecy began to run into the channels of fanaticism. The Montanist movement, which like many similar subsequent movements was preparing for the imminent bodily return of Christ, developed quite a group of prophets—particularly the women Priscilla, Maximilla, and Quintilla. Montanus himself was the author of a prophecy, quoted freely by Epiphanius. From this time prophecy in the orthodox church went into decline. And when Christianity became the religion of the Empire and membership in the church fashionable, there was naturally a cessation of prophetic activity. The development of an ecclesiastical nobility, the hunting of heresy, the formulation of creeds, and the forcible spread of conformity occupied the time of the religious devotees. Those who protested were excommunicated. Miltiades in opposing

Montanus had said, "A prophet must not speak in ecstasy," and Bishop Sotas tried exorcism on Priscilla as on one possessed of an evil spirit (Pullan *op. cit.*, p. 64). So prophecy was discredited in complacent, dignified Christianity.

If we think of a prophet in connection with church history between the third and nineteenth centuries we think not of any Christian, but of Mohammed. He is styled "the prophet," *al-nabî*, or in the Muslim formula, "the apostle," *ar-rasûl*. He felt himself called of God to preach a new doctrine. He called his followers not to respectable complacency, but to adventure. He bothered not about the discussion of what other men had written. He had a message which he believed came directly from God. We may consider him a proponent of an error; but a prophet he was and still is to millions.

In Christianity there continued to be outbreaks of prophecy; but they were attended by excesses and fanaticism. An instance was the Anabaptist movement, started by the so-called Zwickau prophets. Such movements received drastic treatment at the hands of the regular churches, both Catholic and Protestant.

THE PROPHET OF TODAY

Possibly through aversion to Islam the Christian church at large had no interest in contemporary prophecy. In mediaeval and modern times up to the last century the term "prophet" was largely secularized. The Old Testament Prophets were the Prophets (with a capital P); other prophets were mere harbingers or predictors. In Elizabethan times any inspired poet might be called a prophet. Even objects might receive the same appellation. Shakespeare speaks of a torch as

a prophet to the fall of our foes.

(Henry VI, iii, ii, 32).

Tennyson writes of

the mystic fire on a mast-head, prophet of a storm.

(Princess IV, 257).

And so until about a generation ago the popular mind thought of prediction as the main element of prophecy and re-

garded the religious element as non-essential. Hence in England there were so-called "racing prophets," men who were supposed to tell which horse would win and who cashed in heavily on their supposed occult or semi-occult powers. And there was the "weather prophet" who could tell by the behavior of squirrels, the positions of the stars, the moss on trees, or the reactions of his corns whether the weather would be fair or foul.

True, some religious bodies did exalt the function of modern prophecy. The official title of a minister in the Catholic Apostolic or Irvingite Church is "prophet." Joseph Smith and his successors in the "Mormon" Church have been so designated. John Alexander Dowie proclaimed himself a prophet—Elijah III. But the church at large was content to allow prophecy to rest in Biblical times. Luther, Knox, Calvin, the Wesleys, Jonathan Edwards, and Henry Ward Beecher were great preachers; but not many would have thought of calling them prophets.

Then about the end of the last century in America, at least, "the prophets were rediscovered." Amos, it was found, had preached about the social wrongs in the Northern Kingdom of his day. Isaiah had attacked luxury and oppression of the poor and internationalism. Hosea had denounced immorality and formality in religion. Jeremiah had thundered against false patriotism and an unwarranted sense of security. The young prospective preacher was told to go and do likewise. Ecclesiastical diagnosticians writing in church papers and in the secular press explained the perverse spirit of the times and the empty church pews by the lack of prophetic utterance in the pulpit. Sociology was gaining its first recognition as a scientific discipline. And so there went out many young ministers resolved to cast aside expediency and to give courageous, inspired, oracular utterance on the social, economic, and political shortcomings of their generation. A little more than a decade ago, when I was a student in this Seminary, we heard our institution called "the school of the prophets" so often that we wondered why this epithet was not adopted as a slogan and printed beneath "McCormick Theological Seminary" on

the letter heads. We all yearned to be proficient in "prophetic letter heads. We all yearned to be proficient in "prophetic preaching."

Today the pendulum is well on its way back. We can account for this—as we can account for jazz, crime, suicide, the development of aviation, the wantonness of youth, the high moral purpose of youth, the overcrowding of colleges, or prohibition—by the war. The war caught a great many of us inflated with inarticulate prophetic zeal, striving for utterance. Here was our chance to prophecy! And we improved it. How many of us, thinking we at last had caught the divine spark, thundered against the baby-killing, treaty-breaking, body-mutilating Germans. With what fervor we proclaimed the holy crusade to end war and to make the world safe for democracy. We felt our importance when we received official communications from the Government telling us how much the morale of the country depended on the work of the ministers. So we prophesied.

Then came the peace, and in a short time most of us saw how inane and misguided and fallacious were our prophecies of war time. We felt ashamed of ourselves and saw that after all the prophet is prone to be mistaken. So there came naturally some misgivings about prophetic preaching.

This is, of course, but a partial explanation. Doubtless the pendulum would have swung back anyhow.

Prophecy, it is true, has not gone altogether out of fashion. In England there is said to be a clergyman who dresses as a priest during the first part of his services at the altar, but who dons what he considers to be the garb of a prophet before he enters the pulpit. His church is crowded. Several of the most popular preachers in America, who address enormous congregations in their churches and over the radio, readily admit that they are prophets. But they are exceptions.

Now we come to the answer to our question, "What is a prophet?" We may for our purpose disregard the secular use of the term. The racing prophet has become the dopester and the weather prophet has become the weather forecaster. Even

the astrologer professes to be a scientist rather than the oracular mouthpiece of an unseen power. The prophet, then, is primarily a religious personage. He is one who has, or thinks he has, or pretends to have a special message communicated directly to him by his God, which message he is compelled to make public. This definition is in accord with the Biblical usage and the best usage of today. The prophet is not necessarily sincere nor infallible. He may be a conscious fraud, or he may be mistaken.

Doubtless there are mountebanks among the prophets of today. They thrive in cults and possibly in some large churches. Some of their crudest manifestations are at meetings of spiritualists. Prophets of this kind are distinctly a product of urban life. We seldom find them operating in rural communities.

The sincere prophet who is misguided is much more common. He as well as the charlatan must be reckoned as a false prophet; but he deserves our respect and our sympathy. Much of the necessitated shift of locations on the part of small town ministers, and ministers of small churches in the cities, is due to mistaken efforts in the field of prophecy. In some instances the false prophet is able to carry his congregation with him and the congregation will enter with enthusiasm upon some unfortunate program only to come to disillusionment. But we must not pass judgment on our sincere false prophet. We are not competent to give an estimate on him; the future may prove him to be right.

Deserving of our sympathy also may be the prophet who is really guided of God. Some psychologists say that the prophet is one in whose unconscious the yearnings of the race manifest themselves, so that in his ideals he is always a few decades ahead of his fellows. Things which to him seem quite clear are rather confused to those about him. When he preaches, then, he finds the members of the conservative element opposed or unappreciative. They will ridicule him, thwart him, and be disappointed in him. He may know that he is right; but he will not live to see himself recognized as

right. More than the prophet, however, we should pity his wife and children. They have to endure his humiliations, his hardships, his unpopularity; and they, not having his unconscious, are not able to catch the vision of ultimate vindication.

It has been said that a prophet had best do all his prophesying before he starts to raise a family. Jeremiah and Jesus, who were particularly qualified for prophetic work, were unmarried. Isaiah's wife must have been miserable much of the time. What mother would want a son to be named Maher-shalal-hashbaz just to remind his neighbors that a military calamity was threatened? And Hosea's erring spouse must have wished many times that her husband would act like a normal he-man and give her a black eye instead of treating her with sweet, condescending kindness and preaching about her waywardness and his own magnanimity to the whole city. Not all women would be as meek as were the wives of Isaiah and Hosea. Doubtless many prophetic careers have been cut short by practical and capable wives.

Prophets are necessary to progress. They are deserving of all honor. But the prophetic career should not be thrust by us mortals on any young man of normal instincts and ambitions. Least of all should we try to make a candidate for the ministry feel that his chief function is to be prophecy. As Henry Sloane Coffin points out in his book of last year, *What To Preach*, the Prophets of the Old Testament were not parish ministers. "None of them preached steadily to the same congregation" (p.12). Most of the prophetic utterances are brief. They were delivered under pressing needs, not in thirty minute discourses each Sunday morning and evening and each Wednesday night. All of the prophecy recorded in the Old Testament is less in bulk than the words uttered by a pastor in his Sunday morning services in one year—even if he takes a vacation of two months.

Moreover, prophecy is not an art which can be taught. It is true that some of the prophets traveled in schools and undoubtedly there was some technique to prophecy. It is cer-

tain that the Prophets whose messages were worth recording and whose work was received into the canon were well educated men, fully cognizant of the output of their predecessors. They had no hopes that an inspiration from on high would compensate for any laziness on their part. They were active, hard-working, studious men. When the inspiration did come they were competent to express it in good literary form. They were poets and rhetoricians. But for the content of their message they depended on God.

So prophetic preaching cannot be taught today. President Coffin gives direction for expository preaching, doctrinal preaching, ethical preaching, pastoral preaching, and evangelistic preaching. But he disposes of prophetic preaching in a few paragraphs and gives no suggestions as to how to go about it. The best material for preaching comes from the Bible and nothing that a pastor may have can compensate for an inadequate grasp of the Scriptures.

At times any minister may feel called on to utter prophecy. He should know the ecstasy of mystical experiences; he should be profoundly interested in the social order. Occasionally he may feel that he has a directly inspired message. In case he knows his Bible and the language in which he wishes to talk he will have no difficulty in making his utterance lucid.

Finally, the lack of contemporary prophetic utterance is something that need not disturb us. We are not competent to say that there is lack of prophecy. And even if there is, we are not able to do anything about it. It may be that future generations will point to one of our day as a great prophet. The great prophet is not the work of man. He is not the one who says: "Prophecy is a good profession. I will follow it." He may hesitate about accepting the office, as did Moses and Isaiah. He may find the work very distasteful, as did Jeremiah. But he is impelled by the Holy Spirit to speak out. At the proper time God uses him and through him makes the world to know what is right.